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SUBJECT: URUZGAN GOVERNOR HEADED DOWN PATH OF POLITICAL DEMISE, BUT COURSE IS REVERSIBLE

Classified By: Acting DCM Alan Yu 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶11.** (C) Summary: On the eve of his one-year anniversary in office, Uruzgan Governor Hamdam conveyed his growing concern that he will not survive a full term. Hamdam's low profile in the province and his inability to check the influence of local power brokers and rebellious ministry directors are his key challenges. However, the PRT has urged Hamdam not to give up. He is considerably less corrupt and more committed to tribal reconciliation than the two previous governors, and is willing to make adjustments to his management style and performance, but only with the support and help of the PRT. The PRT will work with Hamdam to increase his visibility by embarking on a robust travel schedule throughout the province (with PRT support) and to make greater use of his executive powers to direct line ministry directors and marginalize informal actors. End Summary.

Governor Faces Serious Challenges

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**¶12.** (C) After less than 12 months in office, Assadullah Hamdam has proven to be more effective than his predecessors, but is increasingly showing signs of weakness. Based on several conversations with Hamdam and other provincial leaders, the Governor is particularly vulnerable to criticism in the areas of public engagement and interaction with ministry directors and informal leaders.

Low Visibility

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**¶13.** (C) The most common criticism of Hamdam from provincial leaders and local politicians is that he spends too much time away from the province, and when he is in the province, he rarely leaves his compound. We estimate that the Governor has spent three of the past eight months abroad or in Kabul, although these absences were partly due to medical treatment and official business (such as his participation in the International Visitors Program). Members of Parliament Haji Khairo Jan, Mohammad Hanif Khan, and Sona Nilofar Ahmadzai told PRTOFF that Hamdam has yet to establish his credibility in the province and thus cannot afford to spend so much time away from post. Hamdam's sympathizers, such as Public Health Director Khan Agha, admitted that the Governor's low profile in the province has undermined his already limited influence.

**¶14.** (C) Hamdam is concerned about his personal security. He claimed the IDLG recently issued instructions barring him from leaving the governor's compound in unarmored vehicles, citing a deteriorating security environment. However, in the past six months Hamdam has

rarely requested PRT assistance with traveling, and when presented with the opportunity to travel under ISAF protection to districts to conduct shuras on CN and other issues, Hamdam said his presence was not essential. ANA Brigade Commander Hafizudinn relayed to us that since the August 23 attack on highway commander Matiullah Khan's compound, which is close to the governor's compound, Hamdam has been concerned that his life was in danger. (Note: The Dutch recently purchased and delivered for the governor an armored Land Cruiser.)

#### Opponents

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**¶5. (C) Former Governor:** Hamdam has often complained that former governor and Populzai tribal leader Jan Mohammad Khan (JMK) continues to sow instability in his cabinet and the districts. He listed Deputy Governor Haji Khudoi Rahim, Provincial Chief of Police (PCoP) Jumma Ghul, many ministry directors, and several key ANP district and checkpoint commanders as among those "in JMK's pocket." Hamdam averred that he has not been able to marginalize JMK because of the former governor's close relationship with President Karzai. (JMK, who currently serves as Tribal Affairs Advisor to Karzai, reportedly helped Karzai cope with the murder of his father.) He added that JMK and PCoP Ghul had secured a special meeting with Karzai to urge Hamdam's removal, but Karzai reportedly told the two that his dismissal was not on the agenda. Hamdam has tried to take advantage of a perceived growing split between JMK and JMK's one-time protege Matiullah Khan, but Khan told us that he had little respect for the "gutless governor." (reftel).

**¶6. (C) Ministry Directors:** Most ministry directors place the blame for the province's political and economic stagnation squarely on the shoulders of the governor. Reconstruction and Rural Development

Director Hashim complained that Hamdam was "lazy and a thief," alleging that the governor uses his control on the release of budgets for line ministries to skim money off the top. However, neither Hashim nor other minister directors have been able to offer evidence to support their allegations. Hamdan adamantly denies the accusations, arguing that his only leverage over "rebellious and corrupt" ministry directors is his control of the purse. He determined that the source of the problem was his lack of tribal ties to the province. Hamdam is from the Wardak tribe in Zabul province and nearly all the ministry directors who hold leadership positions are from the province's politically dominant tribes, Populzai and Barakzai. As a result, Hamdam currently enjoys few allies in official and tribal circles.

#### Governor Is Down, But Not Out

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**¶7. (C)** Although Hamdam has repeatedly expressed doubt that he will remain in his position for another year, he can still dig himself out of his current predicament if he is willing to assume the necessary risks. Our current assessment is that the relatively high turnover rate of governors in Uruzgan -- three in the past seven years -- has contributed to the instability in the province. Also, most local officials and leaders admit that Hamdam outshines the past governors; he is less corrupt and more committed to tribal reconciliation than previous governors. Finally, Hamdam is willing to admit his shortcomings and ready to make adjustments to his management style and performance, with the support and help of the PRT.

#### Steps Forward

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**¶8. (C)** We will encourage Hamdam to take the following initial steps to bolster his credibility in the province:

-- Get Rid of "FOB Mentality:" We will urge Hamdam to significantly raise his profile in the province and remind him of PRT's offer to use ISAF-provided transportation, and ISAF and OEF Forward Operating Bases around the province for safe gatherings with district officials and tribal leaders. We will also encourage him to demonstrate his leadership and concern for local problems by regularly participating in governmental, cultural, and public interest events in the districts. He should make the case to his constituents that his lack of local tribal ties is in fact an asset; he is above the fray of tribal politics.

-- Stand Up to JMK: The former governor still holds considerable power in the province, despite not holding elected office. Hamdam could take calculated steps to minimize JMK's interference in provincial matters, while establishing his own authority in the province. The current political standoff in Chora district presents a low-risk opportunity to do so. Following the June election of JMK-opponent Rozi Khan as District Governor, JMK instructed PCoP Ghul to replace Khan with JMK disciple and militia leader Saad Akhund. Akhund has systematically forced out (through harassment or detention) most legitimate ANP police and checkpoint commanders and filled the vacant slots with his own militiamen. Reacting to pressure from the Dutch embassy, MOI has repeatedly instructed Ghul to replace Akhund with ANP LTCOL Nazarullah, but no action has been taken thus far. Moreover, on September 17, Khan was killed in what was most likely a friendly fire incident, and his (less well known) son Daoud was quickly appointed as acting District Governor. JMK will undoubtedly take advantage of the possible power vacuum to shore up support in the district. The PRT recently suggested Hamdam travel to Chora (with PRT escort) to accompany Nazarullah to his new post and express direct support for Daoud. Hamdam's personal involvement in this matter would send a clear signal to JMK and Ghul that he is secure in his position.

-- Redirect Attention of IDLG Advisors: The Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) has dispatched 11 advisors to the Governor over the past nine months through a national program funded by the Asia Foundation. The advisors, who all carry impressive resumes and underwent a rigorous selection process, assert that their primary mission is to support and advocate the interests of the governor. Their greatest value added, however, has been to build the capacity of the line ministries. Even ministry directors acknowledge that they suffer from a deficit of qualified and educated staff. The advisors for public health, agriculture, and rule of law told us that those advisors who focus less on monitoring line ministries and more

on supporting worthy projects of the ministry directors have had more success bridging the "trust gap" between the Governor and the line ministries. Hamdam should direct all of his advisors to spend more time in the offices of the ministry directors in an effort to help identify and overcome the needs of the line ministries.

Comment

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¶9. (C) In many ways, Hamdam has been dealt a weak hand, and has so far failed to rise to the challenge. His governorship remains salvageable, however, with more backbone Hamdam can strengthen his position vis-a-vis power brokers and minister directors in the province. PRT will do its part to support his efforts.

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